



# **Learning from Charter School Management Organizations: Strategies for Student Behavior and Teacher Coaching**

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March 2012



**The National Study of CMO Effectiveness** examines the effects of nonprofit charter school management organizations (CMOs) on student achievement and the practices that are related to positive effects. This report—the last in a series—describes two types of CMO practices—student behavior policies and teacher coaching—that are associated with positive impacts on math and reading achievement. The study, which began in May 2008, was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and the University of Washington’s Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). It was commissioned by NewSchools Venture Fund, with the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation.

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**The Center on Reinventing Public Education** ([www.crpe.org](http://www.crpe.org)) at the University of Washington engages in independent research and policy analysis on a range of K-12 public education reform issues, including choice & charters, finance & productivity, teachers, urban district reform, leadership, and state & federal reform. CRPE’s work is based on two premises: that public schools should be measured against the goal of educating all children well, and that current institutions too often fail to achieve this goal. Our research uses evidence from the field and lessons learned from other sectors to understand complicated problems and to design innovative and practical solutions for policymakers, elected officials, parents, educators, and community leaders.

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# Acknowledgements

This report from the National Study of Charter Management Organization Effectiveness reflects the efforts of a number of researchers, advisors, funder staff, and educators from the organizations profiled in this report.

First, we would like to thank the CMO staff and principals from Aspire Public Schools, Inner City Education Foundation Public Schools, KIPP DC, Uncommon Schools, and YES Prep Public Schools, who generously shared their time and thoughts with our research team. Without them this report would not have been possible.

The study was commissioned by NewSchools Venture Fund, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Walton Family Foundation. At NewSchools, Jim Peyser provided constructive feedback. David Silver from Gates and Marc Holley from Walton also provided thoughtful guidance.

The study team includes a number of individuals beyond the authors of this report. At Mathematica, Ira Nichols-Barrer and Alexandra Killewald contributed supplementary analysis. We also received extremely helpful comments on the draft report from Christina Tuttle, expert editing assistance from Cindy George, and great word processing and graphics help from Jane Nelson and Jill Miller.

At CRPE, Michael DeArmond provided research assistance and careful technical review; Debra Britt helped with editing, layout, and communications.

We are also grateful to Brianna Dusseault of Seattle Public Schools for her thoughtful review.





# Executive Summary

The two practices that exhibit a strong association with impacts are schoolwide student behavior programs and teacher coaching.

The National Study of CMO Effectiveness is a four-year study designed to assess the impact of CMOs on student achievement and to identify CMO structures and practices that are most effective in raising achievement. Earlier reports from the study documented substantial variation in CMOs' student achievement impacts and in CMOs' use of particular educational strategies and practices.<sup>1</sup> The last report from the study found that the most effective CMOs tend to emphasize two practices in particular: high expectations for student behavior and intensive teacher coaching and monitoring.<sup>2</sup> This report provides a more in-depth description of these two promising CMO practices, drawing on surveys and interviews with staff in high-performing CMOs that emphasize one or both practices.

## Methods

To identify practices associated with positive achievement impacts, the study team measured impacts on math and reading among the middle schools of 22 CMOs. We then explored which practices are more likely to be employed by the most successful CMOs. Although this kind of analysis is correlational and cannot provide strong evidence that the practices directly cause the observed impacts of CMOs on student achievement, it can identify practices that are promising. In addition to student behavior policies and teacher coaching, the practices examined included the amount of instructional time, use of a standardized curriculum and instructional materials, performance-based teacher evaluation and compensation, and intensive use of student formative assessment data.<sup>3</sup>

Among these practices, the two that exhibit a strong association with impacts are schoolwide student behavior programs and teacher coaching. The behavior measure captures consistent within-school behavioral standards, use of clear consequences for student behavior, a zero-tolerance policy for dangerous behavior, and the requirement of students and/or parents to sign a written commitment relating to their responsibilities. The teacher coaching measure captures the frequency of observation of new teachers by

1. Joshua Furgeson et al., *Charter-School Management Organizations: Diverse Strategies and Diverse Student Impacts*, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and Center on Reinventing Public Education, January 2012; Robin Lake, Brianna Dusseault, Melissa Bowen, Allison Demeritt, Paul Hill, *The National Study of Charter Management Organization Effectiveness: Report on Interim Findings*, Center on Reinventing Public Education and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., June 2010.
2. Furgeson et al., *Charter-School Management Organizations*.
3. Ibid.

administrators and coaches, feedback to new teachers, and submission of lesson plans for review.<sup>4</sup>

To examine the two promising practices as implemented among effective CMOs, we first identified CMOs that (1) have above-average impacts and (2) tend to emphasize teacher coaching or schoolwide behavior programs (or both) more than other CMOs. Five CMOs meet these criteria: **Aspire Public Schools (Aspire)**, **Inner City Education Foundation (ICEF)**, **KIPP DC**, **Uncommon Schools (Uncommon)**, and **YES Prep Public Schools (YES Prep)**. Relative to other CMOs, Aspire places more emphasis on teacher coaching; ICEF places more emphasis on schoolwide behavior; and KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep stand out for their emphasis on both practices. The descriptions of practices and examples from CMOs in this report are based on interviews with CMO central office and school staff members along with data from surveys of CMO staff, principals, and teachers.

## Findings

*With the aim of promoting a safe and focused learning environment, CMOs create high expectations for student behavior by establishing clear and consistent behavior codes and ensuring adults model positive behaviors.*

Four high-performing CMOs in our study place a great emphasis on schoolwide behavior policies relative to other CMOs: **ICEF Public Schools**, **KIPP DC**, **Uncommon Schools**, and **YES Prep**. Although each of these CMOs approaches the creation of student culture in somewhat different ways, they all believe that success would be impossible without these policies. As indicated in Figure 1, these CMOs differ from other CMOs and from regular public schools in their stronger emphasis on four specific practices reported at the school level: use of a student behavior code with clear consequences for misbehavior, positive reinforcements for desired behaviors, use of a “zero tolerance” policy for potentially dangerous behaviors, and consistent schoolwide enforcement of the behavioral standards and policies in place.

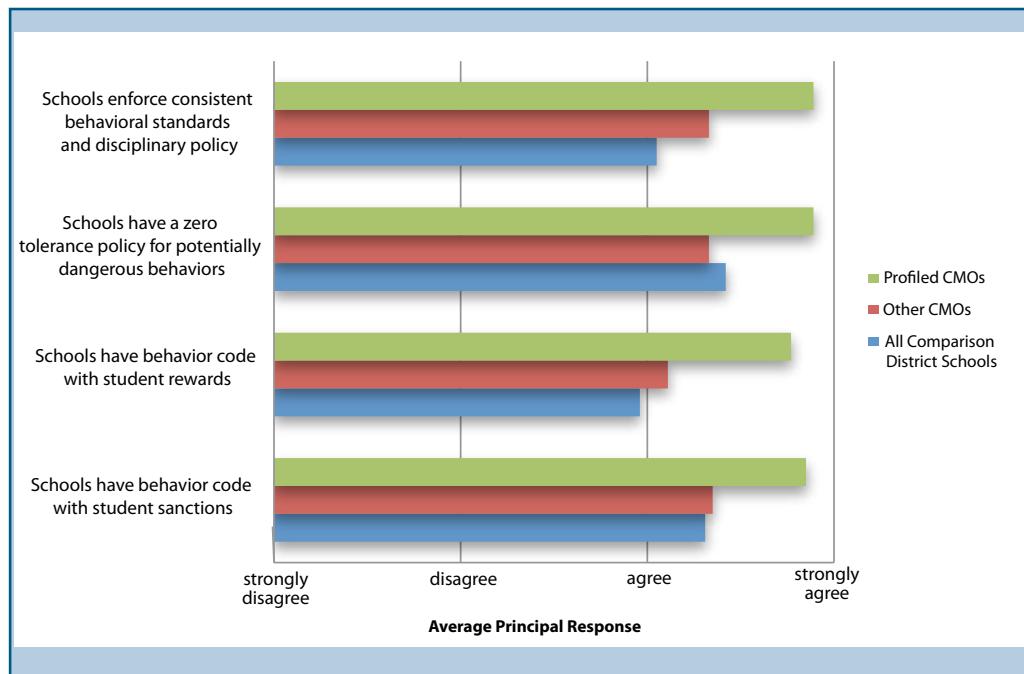
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4. Ibid.





**Figure 1.** Profiled CMOs differ significantly from other CMOs and from comparison district schools in their approaches to student behavior



SOURCE: Principal survey.

NOTE: Differences between profiled CMOs (ICEF, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep) and other CMOs and between profiled CMOs and comparison district schools are all statistically significant at the 5 percent level. The other measure included in our overall composite of student behavior policy is whether either parents or students are required to sign a responsibility agreement; there were no statistically significant differences between the four CMOs and other CMOs on this measure.

While the four CMOs employ slightly different behavior policies and implement them in distinct ways, their policies are based on six broad, common principles:

- **Design behavior policies and practices to foster a safe and focused learning environment, thereby promoting student achievement.** The CMOs all use coherent, detailed programs to promote the development of effective social norms and behaviors throughout the school environment. However, these programs do not sit as isolated sets of policies; rather, they are coherently integrated with CMOs' broader theories of action and rely heavily on positive relationships between staff and students.
- **Encourage consistency across classrooms to create clear expectations for students.** The programs used by these CMOs aim to provide unambiguous standards of behavior as well as a routinized set of consequences for violations of these standards. Doing so, they believe, helps students learn that behavioral codes are non-negotiable.

- **Expect adults to model and enforce norms for student behavior.** The four CMOs have a common approach to creating an orderly school culture: model the behavior, reinforce actions consistently, and achieve buy-in from all members of the community. Consequently, while “paycheck” or merit/demerkit systems are the backbones of culture-building efforts, these CMOs emphasize the importance of student, teacher, and parent norms or “buy-in” to solidify schoolwide culture.
- **Ask parents to reinforce and support school actions.** These CMOs ask parents and students to sign contracts that clarify their responsibilities and demonstrate their commitment to the schooling process. While the contracts are not binding, they represent the first step in building parent commitment and a productive and trusting relationship with school staff.
- **Prescribe some student behavior policies, but give schools flexibility in implementation.** The four CMOs profiled here vary in the degree to which the home office specifies the student behavior policies and plans to be used in schools. All see managing behavior as paramount, believe in high expectations for students, and have specific ideas about how school culture should look. Yet all also recognize that schools must own their policies and create their own cultures.
- **Emphasize teacher training to support high standards for classroom behavior.** Leaders at the four CMOs see getting the right teachers on board and training them appropriately as crucial for successful implementation of a behavior program. To inform the way teachers manage behavior, all the profiled CMOs provide professional development and coaching to teachers as well as handbooks and other tools. For all four CMOs, the purpose of providing training and guiding documents is to ensure that teachers know how to respond in consistent ways when presented with student behavior.

These programs are not isolated sets of policies; rather, they are coherently integrated with the CMOs' broader theories of action.

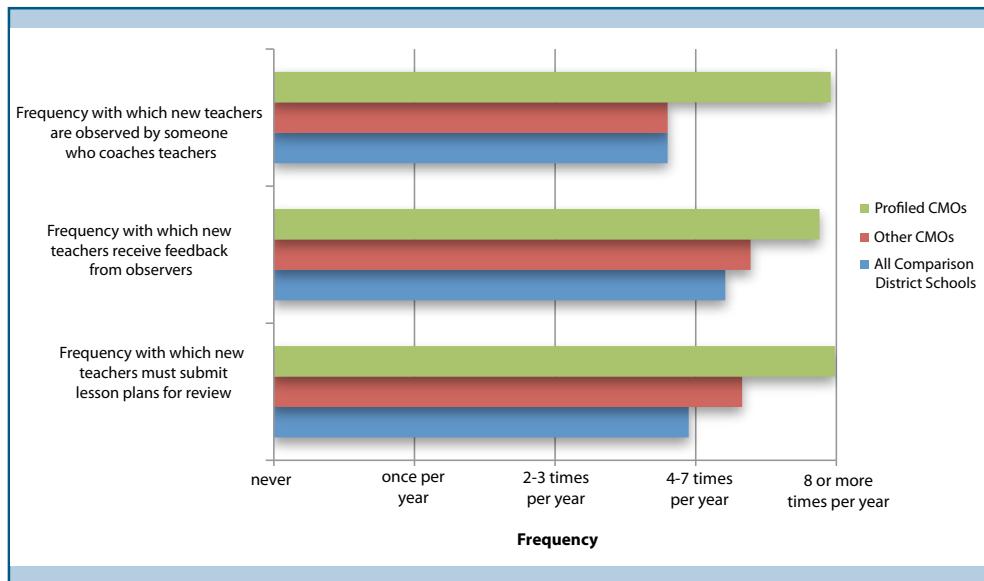
### *CMOs align targeted, frequent coaching investments with staff and school needs.*

Four of the five high-performing CMOs included in our study provide relatively intensive coaching for teachers: **Aspire, KIPP DC, Uncommon Schools and YES Prep.** According to our survey of CMO principals, new teachers are observed and monitored much more often in these four CMOs compared to the rest of the CMOs in our study and to nearby district schools. Specifically, coaching intensity is reflected in the higher frequency with which teachers are observed by master teachers or others who coach teachers, receive feedback on their performance, and submit lesson plans for review (see Figure 2).





**Figure 2.** Profiled CMOs differ significantly from other CMOs and from comparison district schools in frequency of observation, feedback, and review of lesson plans for new teachers



SOURCE: Principal survey.

NOTE: Differences between profiled CMOs (Aspire, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep) and other CMOs and between profiled CMOs and comparison district schools are all statistically significant at the 5 percent level. The other measure included in our overall composite of teacher coaching and monitoring is the frequency with which new teachers are observed by principals or administrators; there were no statistically significant differences between the four CMOs and other CMOs on this measure.

The coaching-intensive CMOs seek to enhance teacher effectiveness in the following five ways:

- **Strategically target teacher needs.** The four coaching-intensive CMOs attempt to provide highly individualized support designed to address the unique needs of each teacher, whether new or experienced, struggling or thriving. Coaching supports for instruction or classroom management can include more frequent observations, highly structured feedback, or review of lesson plans.
- **Tightly align coaching with school and central office goals.** Coaching is well coordinated with school and organization-wide instructional goals and normed with what the principals and other coaches are doing, so that teachers receive consistent feedback and expectations. Coaching interventions are often closely tied to schoolwide use of formative assessment data.
- **Observe teachers frequently and provide rapid feedback.** Across the four CMOs, central office staff believe that effective coaching requires frequent contact between coaches and teachers. Coaches are typically in each school one to two full days per week.

- **Select coaches who have specific skills and can form solid relationships with teachers.** Because coaching is such an integral part of these CMOs, coaches are chosen with care whether they are groomed from within or hired externally. Coaches must, of course, be skilled at the CMO's approach to instruction and classroom management. But many CMOs have found that what makes a great teacher is not sufficient to make a good coach.
- **Ensure other personnel practices and school culture support coaching.** CMO staff stressed the importance of ensuring that everyone, including teachers, principals, coaches, and central office support staff, is “on the same page” about schoolwide and organization-wide goals. Teachers at the school must be open to feedback and coaches or principals must be able to take action if teachers do not respond to suggestions. CMO leaders also say they do not think their coaches could be effective without a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement based on data.

## Potential Implications

These two promising practices—high expectations for student behavior and teacher coaching—are important to consider on their own merits, but are also closely related and appear to be mutually reinforcing. Although these CMO leaders have put a great deal of thought and resources into developing their student culture and coaching systems, they caution that the practices should not be considered “silver bullets.” In fact, they may be proxies for other related organizational elements that our survey could not adequately capture. Our interviews suggest that these practices may be more effective when they are coordinated or implemented in conjunction with other strategies, such as the following:

- Recruitment and training of strong school leaders who can monitor and improve instruction, hold teachers accountable, and set the tone for behavior/school culture
- Commitment to college-going expectations and academic supports for all students, regardless of background
- Development of strong data systems, time set aside for teachers to analyze and discuss data, and an expectation that teachers will regularly adjust instruction based on evidence
- Formulation of school or systemwide instructional goals and frameworks to guide teacher, coach, and principal action
- Development of strong, trusting relationships between school staff and students
- Provision of resources (such as handbooks and online lesson plans) from the central office to inform teacher practice
- Cultivation of commitments from parents to reinforce school actions

These CMO leaders are committed to creating an environment where staff are pushed to continuously learn and grow in the instructional and behavior management skills that translate into student achievement. They are intentional in how they align resources and structures to support these ends.



Some districts are experimenting with strategies similar to those of high-performing CMOs. In a few cases, this is occurring in close collaboration with charter schools. Experimenting with and evaluating these new strategies will be important to improve practices across charter and district public schools more broadly.

The five CMOs profiled in this report faced relatively few constraints as they developed their overall approaches and practices. They started from scratch and had the ability to selectively hire their central office and school staff. These particular CMO schools are not subject to seniority or tenure rules affecting which staff are dismissed, retained, or promoted. The staff, students, and families actively choose to be at these schools and agree to the expectations.

Some of the conditions that CMO leaders feel are necessary for success may not be present in district schools, in other charter schools, or even in other CMOs. For example, some districts explicitly prohibit the use of student rewards, which are important to the student behavior systems of these CMOs. While districts may lack the autonomy or organizational flexibility to apply some practices, independent charters may lack the economies of scale needed to implement effective coaching. In some CMOs, coaches are stationed in the central office and serve multiple schools. On the other hand, scale can bring its own challenges for CMOs.<sup>5</sup> One Aspire manager, for example, worries how the organization will maintain its coaching quality as the organization continues to grow. ICEF has experienced financial difficulties, underscoring the need for a financial model that can sustain the cost of coaching and other intensive teacher supports without heavy reliance on philanthropy.

Perhaps most importantly, these organizations' leaders are committed to creating an environment where staff are pushed to continuously learn and grow in the instructional and behavior management skills that translate into student achievement. They are willing to put the conditions in place that promote these values, and they are intentional in how they align resources (such as funding for coaches) and structures (such as career ladders to grow coaches internally, or consistently enforced behavior management policies) to support these ends.

Some districts are already experimenting with strategies similar to the practices of high-performing CMOs, and these new initiatives could inform future policy and practice. These districts are refining their teacher evaluation, professional development, seniority rules, and collective bargaining agreements in ways that give principals and teacher coaches greater ability to intervene with struggling teachers. In a few cases, this is occurring in close collaboration with charter schools. Experimenting with and evaluating these new strategies will be important to improve practices across charter and district public schools more broadly.

5. See Lake et al., *The National Study of Charter Management Organization Effectiveness*.

**SECTION 1**

# Introduction

The National Study of Charter Management Organization (CMO) Effectiveness is a four-year study designed to assess the impact of CMOs on student achievement and to identify effective structures and practices. An earlier report from this study documented the substantial variation in CMO student achievement impacts as well as variation in CMOs' use of particular educational strategies and practices.<sup>6</sup> That report noted that the most effective CMOs emphasize two practices in particular: schoolwide behavior strategies and intensive teacher coaching and monitoring.

This report is designed to provide an in-depth description of the student behavior and teacher coaching practices of five high-performing CMOs that rely on these practices. Focusing on five high-performing CMOs, the report seeks to help educators learn more about these promising practices. In this introduction, we summarize how we determined which practices are related to impacts, the criteria used to identify the CMOs that are described in this report, the data sources for this report and their limitations, and the organization of the report.

This report is designed to provide an in-depth description of the student behavior and teacher coaching practices of five high-performing CMOs.

## Student Achievement Impacts of CMO Schools

The National Study of CMO Effectiveness measured impacts on math and reading achievement test scores for students attending the middle schools of 22 CMOs. The study team estimated achievement impacts using a method that measures how well CMO students perform relative to students with similar backgrounds and prior achievement attending traditional public schools. The analysis sample includes approximately 19,000 students attending 68 CMO schools. The test score outcomes cover the period from the 1997–1998 school year through the 2009–2010 school year (depending on the age of the CMO and the data available from the jurisdiction). We confirmed the validity of this method in a subset of sites using an even more rigorous method (an experimental design).<sup>7</sup> Among the CMOs included in the study, achievement impacts varied substantially in both magnitude and direction (positive or negative). Figure I.1 shows the distribution of estimated two-year math and reading impacts, where each bubble represents 1 of the

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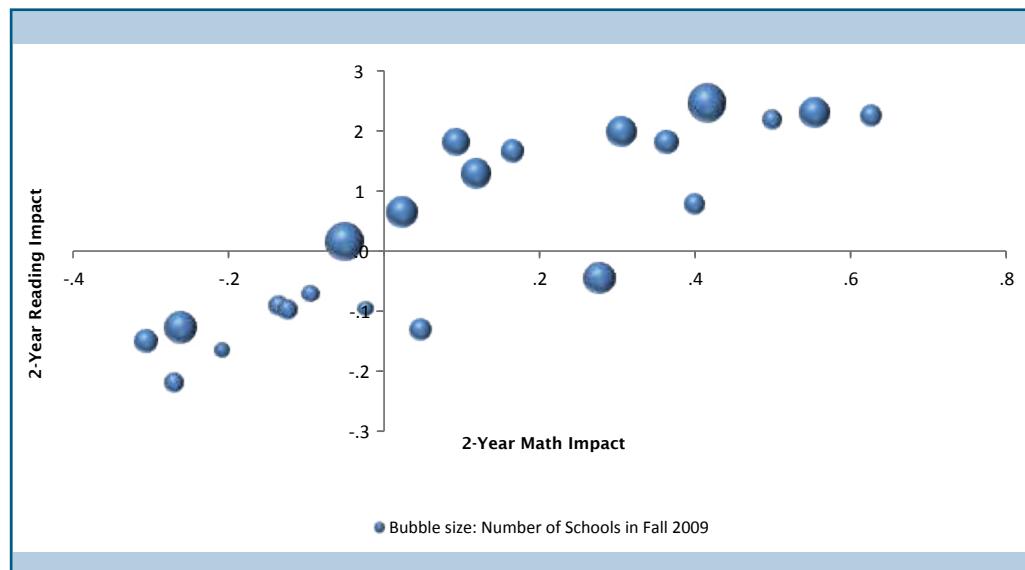
6. Joshua Furgeson et al., *Charter-School Management Organizations: Diverse Strategies and Diverse Student Impacts*, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and Center on Reinventing Public Education, January 2012.
7. For a complete description of the methods used to estimate impacts, see Furgeson et al., *Charter-School Management Organizations*.





22 CMOs. The size of the bubble in Figure I.1 represents the number of schools each CMO operated in fall 2009. CMOs above the horizontal axis had positive impacts in reading, and CMOs to the right of the vertical axis had positive impacts in math. Half of the CMOs (11 of 22) have significantly positive impacts in math and/or reading, and 9 have significantly negative impacts in one or both subjects. CMOs with positive impacts in one subject tend to have positive impacts in the other subject. Larger CMOs are slightly more likely to have positive impacts.

**Figure I.1.** Test score impacts in math and reading vary considerably across CMOs



SOURCE: State, district and CMO school records.

## CMO Practices Related to Impacts

This observed variation in impacts, along with the variation in CMO approaches reported by principals and CMO staff, implies that some CMOs may be engaging in practices that contribute to larger, positive impacts on students. The study explored which practices are more likely to be employed by the most successful CMOs. Prior to analyzing student achievement results, the study team defined seven primary hypotheses about which practices and other factors might contribute to CMO impacts on students.

These hypotheses focused on practices that (1) might plausibly affect student achievement, (2) are more commonly found among CMO schools than among traditional public schools, and (3) vary in their prevalence across the CMOs in our sample (making it possible for them to at least partly account for any observed variation in impacts).<sup>8</sup>

The seven primary factors that we proposed might be related to impacts on student achievement were:

1. Amount of instructional time
2. Consistent educational approach, including curriculum and instructional materials
3. Student behavior practices that include specific rewards, consequences, and commitments
4. Intensive teacher coaching and monitoring
5. Performance-based teacher evaluation and compensation
6. Frequent review and analysis of student formative assessment data
7. Number of CMO schools

The study examined the extent to which each of these factors is associated with CMO impacts on student achievement. We first examined the bivariate association of each practice with impacts, and then conducted multivariate analyses that control for other practices correlated with impacts. These analyses indicated that student impacts in math and reading after two years are larger for (1) CMOs whose schools have comprehensive behavior strategies and (2) CMOs that place a greater emphasis on intensive coaching of new teachers.<sup>9</sup> The study team found no significant or substantial relationship between impacts and the other CMO practices tested.

The specific survey responses used to construct the measures of schoolwide behavior strategies and intensive teacher coaching and monitoring are described in Table I.1.

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8. In addition to the seven primary hypotheses, the team tested 43 secondary hypotheses. Both the primary and secondary hypotheses used measures of CMO practices and characteristics collected through surveys of CMO central office staff, principals, and teachers. Most of the measures relied on the principal surveys, which were conducted in 2010, and most questions referred to CMO and school practices in the 2009–2010 school year.
9. In bivariate analyses, behavioral policies and teacher coaching are significantly associated with math impacts, with alphas of .01 and .05, respectively, and significantly or marginally significantly associated with reading impacts, with alphas of .05 and .10, respectively. The association of impacts with schoolwide behavior policies remains statistically significant and substantial in magnitude (in both subjects) in the multivariate model that controls for other practices correlated with impacts. The association of impacts with teacher coaching and monitoring is no longer significant at the .05 level in the multivariate model, but this appears to be due to a reduction in statistical power: the point estimates decline only marginally from the bivariate estimate, and remain substantial in magnitude.

Our analyses indicated that student impacts in math and reading after two years are larger for (1) CMOs whose schools have comprehensive behavior strategies and (2) CMOs that place a greater emphasis on intensive coaching of new teachers.





The measures are based on CMO principals' responses to items from the principal survey, relative to the responses of principals of traditional public schools nearby.<sup>10</sup>

The student behavior measure includes items related to consistent within-school behavior standards, use of student rewards and consequences, a zero-tolerance policy for dangerous behavior, and the requirement of students and/or parents to sign a written commitment relating to their responsibilities.

This analysis is exploratory and does not provide evidence of a causal relationship, but it provides some preliminary evidence about which practices have the most potential to be promising and should be explored further.

The teacher coaching and monitoring measure captures the frequency of observation of new teachers by administrators and coaches, feedback to new teachers, and submission of lesson plans for review. Although the measures listed in Table I.1 focus on new teachers, the data regarding the frequency of coaching and monitoring for new teachers are consistent with similar data collected relating to experienced teachers (those with two or more years of experience).

It is important to note that this analysis is exploratory and does not provide evidence of a causal relationship. Any observed association between impacts and a given CMO practice, for example, could be due to some other CMO practice that affects impacts but was not measured and is correlated with the practice that was tested. That said, examining these associations provides some preliminary evidence about which practices have the most potential to be promising and should be explored further.

**Table I.1.** Survey items used in composite measures of teacher coaching and student behavior strategies

Composite Measure	Principal Survey Items Included
Student behavior strategies that include specific rewards, consequences, and commitments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School enforces consistent behavioral standards and disciplinary policy</li> <li>2. School has zero tolerance policy for potentially dangerous behaviors</li> <li>3. School has behavior code with student rewards</li> <li>4. School has behavior code with student sanctions</li> <li>5. Parent or student required to sign responsibility agreement</li> </ol>
Intensive teacher coaching and monitoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Frequency with which new teachers are observed by coaches</li> <li>2. Frequency with which new teachers are observed by principals/administrators</li> <li>3. Frequency with which new teachers receive feedback from observers</li> <li>4. Frequency with which new teachers must submit lesson plans for review</li> </ol>

10. For each CMO, the value for each composite is a mean of the difference of the responses of the CMO's principals and their matched district school principals, weighted to adjust for nonresponse.

## The Five CMOs Described in This Report and How They Were Selected

To examine the two promising practices as implemented among effective CMOs, we first identified CMOs that have above average impacts and tend to emphasize teacher coaching or schoolwide behavior (or both). We selected the CMOs that met both of the following criteria:

- Significantly positive two-year impacts in both math and reading, exceeding the impact of the average CMO
- Ranking among the top third of CMOs in emphasis on either teacher coaching/monitoring or schoolwide behavior strategies or both, with a majority of individual schools ranking above average

Five CMOs met these criteria, as shown in Table I.2: Aspire Public Schools (Aspire), Inner City Education Foundation (ICEF), Knowledge Is Power Program: DC (KIPP DC), Uncommon Schools (Uncommon), and YES Prep Public Schools (YES Prep). Aspire emphasizes teacher coaching; ICEF emphasizes student behavior; and KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep emphasize both. To confirm principal reports of an emphasis on these practices, researchers also examined related teacher survey data.

**Table I.2.** CMOs that met selection criteria

	Above-Average Impact in Math	Above-Average Impact in Reading	Top Third Ranking in Emphasis on Behavior	Top Third Ranking in Emphasis on Teacher Coaching
Aspire	✓	✓		✓
ICEF	✓	✓	✓	
KIPP DC	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uncommon	✓	✓	✓	✓

The five CMOs included in this report vary in both size and geographic location (see Table I.3) but primarily operate in urban areas. Four of the five CMOs are at least 10 years old, while one (Uncommon) is a relatively newer organization.

**Table I.3.** Characteristics of CMOs included in report

	Year Established	Location of Central Office	Number of Schools in 2009-10
Aspire	2000	Oakland, CA	25
ICEF	1999	Los Angeles, CA	15
KIPP DC	2001	Washington, DC	7
Uncommon	2005	New York, NY	16
YES Prep	1998	Houston, TX	7

Relative to other CMOs, those profiled in this report stand out for high expectations regarding schoolwide behavior, intensive teacher coaching, or both.

Relative to other CMOs, those profiled in this report stand out for high expectations regarding schoolwide behavior, intensive teacher coaching, or both. Table I.4 compares the four profiled CMOs that emphasize high expectations for student behavior with all other responding CMOs in terms of particular aspects of their focus on student behavior. Similarly, Table I.5 compares the four profiled intensive-coaching CMOs with all other responding CMOs in terms of the frequency with which they observe and provide feedback to teachers.

**Table I.4.** Schools of profiled CMOs enforce consistent behavior strategies

	ICEF, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep	All Other CMOs
Proportion of CMOs in which at least 75% of schools require students/parents to sign a responsibility agreement	100%	58%
Mean level of agreement that schools enforce consistent behavioral standards and disciplinary policy*	3.9	3.3
Mean level of agreement that schools have a zero tolerance policy for potential dangerous behaviors*	4.0	3.4
Mean level of agreement that schools have a behavior code that includes rewards*	3.8	3.1
Mean level of agreement that schools have a behavior code that includes sanctions*	3.8	3.4

Source: Principal survey.

\*Measured on a 1-4 scale, in which 1 corresponds to strongly disagree, 2 corresponds to disagree, 3 corresponds to agree, and 4 corresponds to strongly agree.

**Table I.5.** Profiled CMOs observe and provide feedback to teachers frequently

	ICEF, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep	All Other CMOs
Proportion of CMOs in which new teachers are observed by a master teacher or coach more than 7 times per year, on average	100%	45%
Proportion of CMOs in which new teachers are observed by a principal or administrator more than 7 times per year, on average	100%	84%
Proportion of CMOs in which new teachers receive feedback from an observer more than 7 times per year, on average	100%	75%
Proportion of CMOs in which new teachers submit lesson plans for review more than 7 times per year, on average	100%	74%

SOURCE: Principal survey.

It is important to note that either the impacts or the practices of these five CMOs may have changed after the period covered by the study, so some of these CMOs may no longer meet the above criteria. With respect to CMO practices, for example, ICEF has in the past two years undergone significant management and strategic changes as a result of difficulties in securing sufficient funding and covering costs. As a result, the CMO has cut back staff and reduced the intensity of teacher coaching. Similarly, student achievement impacts may have changed in any of these CMOs following the 2009–2010 school year, the last year covered by the impact analysis. ICEF, for example, reports that its test scores dropped in the 2010–2011 school year. Nonetheless, the practices and impacts observed in CMOs during the period of study remain relevant for providing guidance to educators and policymakers.

## **Data Sources Used in This Report and Their Limitations**

The descriptions of practices and examples from CMOs in this report are based on interviews with CMO school and central office staff members. During December 2011 and January 2012, the study team conducted hour-long, one-on-one phone interviews with two to three respondents per CMO. Researchers interviewed at least one central office staff member and at least one current or former school principal at each CMO. Researchers followed one structured interview protocol for central office staff and another for principals in order to





This report is designed to be a resource for CMOs, schools, and districts interested in adopting the promising practices described here. It is an illustration of the two key practices that appear to be drivers of student achievement rather than an analysis of the most effective ways to implement those practices.

collect information both on the role of the home office in prescribing and monitoring school practices and on the implementation of these practices in schools.<sup>11</sup>

The interviews focused primarily on CMO coaching and behavior strategies. The coaching questions covered topics such as how instructional coaches are selected, trained, and overseen; the role administrators and other staff play in coaching teachers; and how frequently teachers are observed and provided feedback. The school behavior questions covered the use of rewards and sanctions, how behavioral expectations are communicated to students and parents, whether and how student behavior policies are set at the central office level, and the supports teachers receive in implementing behavior policies. For both practices, researchers also asked whether there are other important practices or conditions that may contribute to effective behavior policies and coaching supports.

This report is designed to be a resource for CMOs, schools, and districts interested in adopting the promising practices described here, but it should not be considered a blueprint for improving student achievement. In addition to the issues described above regarding the lack of direct causal evidence and the time frame of the study, the number of interviews we conducted is small and may not fully capture the variety of views within a given CMO. There may be more variation in practices within CMOs than we were able to capture. Finally, our analysis relies primarily on information reported by school staff, rather than practices directly observed in schools or central offices. For these reasons, this report is an illustration of the two key practices that appear to be drivers of student achievement rather than an analysis of the most effective ways to implement those practices.

## Organization of This Report

The rest of this report is organized as follows:

- **Section II: High Expectations for Student Behavior.** This description of promising student behavior practices focuses on the four high-performing CMOs that emphasized high expectations for schoolwide behavior—namely ICEF, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep.
- **Section III: Teacher Coaching.** This section describes the strategies of the high-performing CMOs that intensively coached and monitored new teachers—Aspire, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep.
- **Section IV: Potential Implications.** This section briefly discusses some potential implications of our findings for practitioners and policymakers.

11. The report also draws upon a previous round of site visits conducted with some of the CMO central office and school staff in early 2009, surveys of CMO central office staff conducted in late 2009, and the principal and teacher surveys conducted in 2010.

## SECTION 2

# High Expectations for Student Behavior

### Key Findings

- The four CMOs developed student behavior policies and practices designed to foster a safe and focused learning environment to promote student achievement
- Consistency across classrooms creates clear expectations for students
- Adults model and enforce norms for student behavior
- Parents are expected to reinforce and support school behavior expectations
- Central offices prescribe some student behavior policies, but schools have flexibility in implementation
- Teacher training supports high standards for classroom behavior

Just as CMOs focus on coaching to improve teaching capacity, so too do they focus on student behavior to improve learning capacity. Four of the five CMOs profiled in this report—**ICEF Public Schools, KIPP DC, Uncommon Schools, and YES Prep**—place high importance on developing and maintaining student behavioral expectations aimed at creating safe, orderly school environments conducive to student learning. CMOs believe that comprehensive and codified sets of policies help students develop necessary behavioral habits and reinforce the school’s achievement goals. This in turn allows teachers to spend more time on instruction and less time on behavior management.

The student behavioral programs in these CMOs often involve character ideals as well as specific behavioral expectations. Together, these are thought to contribute to both the short-term maintenance of discipline and longer-term character development of students. The policies can be thought of as the structure that sets the stage for what is often referred to as schoolwide “culture”: the shared norms and values that guide classroom behavior, students’ interactions with adults and one another, and dress and general comportment.

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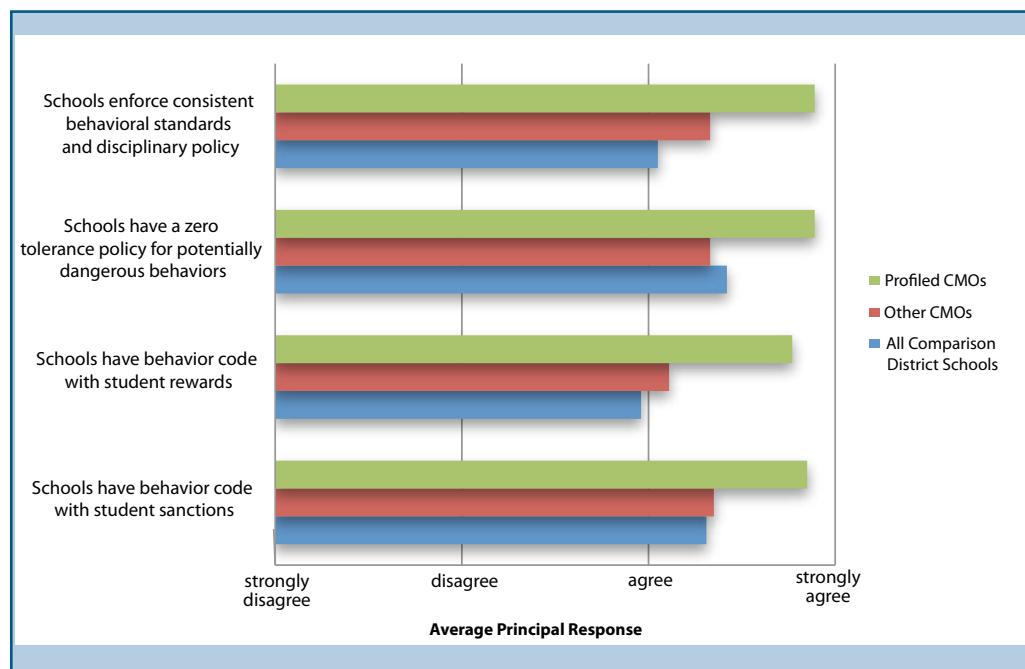


As discussed in Section 1, the CMOs profiled here differ in significant ways both from our overall sample of CMOs and from nearby district schools in their emphasis on schoolwide policies for managing student behavior. On average, the principals of schools in the CMOs profiled are more likely than other CMOs in the study and nearby district schools to strongly agree that the school has a student behavior code with sanctions, has a behavior code with rewards, has a “zero tolerance” policy for certain behaviors, and consistently enforces behavioral standards and policies in place at the school level (see Figure II.1).

The existence of high standards for student behavior, including “zero tolerance” policies, might raise a question about whether the positive achievement impacts of these CMOs are artificially inflated by removing a subset of students who are difficult to educate. In fact, our method for estimating impacts cannot be biased by this kind of artificial inflation, because students who leave the CMOs remain part of the “treatment” group for purposes of analysis. These CMOs are achieving positive impacts even when the students who have left are included in their effects.

Nonetheless, it is possible in principle that removing disruptive students would make it easier to produce positive impacts (even when the removed students are included in the calculations). For example, removing these students from the classroom may make it easier for other students to learn. We lack data on the specific reasons that students exit schools, but we examined cumulative total rates of exit from the schools (regardless of the reason for exit) to explore the issue. Three of the four CMOs profiled in this section—KIPP DC, YES Prep, and Uncommon—have cumulative rates of exit that are comparable to or lower than the rates of exit from conventional middle schools in their local districts. The cumulative rate of exit from ICEF middle schools is slightly higher than that of the local district: Fifteen percent of ICEF’s sixth-graders depart before completing 8th grade, versus ten percent of sixth-graders in the local district. In sum, we do not find strong indications that selective attrition might be a primary reason for these CMOs’ positive impacts.

**Figure II.1.** Profiled CMOs differ significantly from other CMOs and from comparison district schools in their approaches to student behavior



SOURCE: Principal survey.

NOTE: Differences between profiled CMOs (ICEF, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep) and other CMOs and between profiled CMOs and comparison district schools are all statistically significant at the 5 percent level. The other measure included in our overall composite of student behavior policy is whether either parents or students are required to sign a responsibility agreement; there were no statistically significant differences between the four CMOs and other CMOs on this measure.

Although the CMOs profiled in this section—**ICEF Public Schools, KIPP DC, Uncommon Schools, and YES Prep**—approach the creation of an orderly and respectful student culture in somewhat different ways, they all believe that success would be impossible without these policies. Table II.1 summarizes some of the key practices that comprise these CMOs’ approaches to student behavior, teacher training, parent involvement, and systems for communicating expectations. In the sections below, we delve more deeply into the common themes and the differences in their approaches that are not easily captured in a summary table.

## Enforce Behavior Expectations Designed to Foster Safety, Focus, and a “College-Going” Culture

Leaders of these CMOs stressed that high expectations for student behavior are critical for producing both the social order necessary for learning and a cultural environment that supports educational achievement. These CMOs all utilize coherent and detaile

CMO leaders stressed that high expectations for student behavior are critical for producing both the social order necessary for learning and a cultural environment that supports educational achievement.



programs to promote the development of effective social norms and behaviors throughout the school environment. However, these programs are not isolated sets of policies; rather, they are coherently integrated with the CMOs' broader theories of action.

**Table II.1** Summary of profiled CMOs' behavior programs, including parent involvement plans and teacher training strategies

	Uncommon	ICEF	YES Prep	KIPP DC
<b>Parent contract</b>	Varies by region	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Parent orientation/ meetings</b>	Yes	Yes, 10 per year	Yes	Yes
<b>Training for teachers focused on classroom management</b>	Yes: summer and ongoing coaching	Week-long summer training	Yes	Majority of summer training is spent on behavior/classroom management
<b>Reward/consequence system</b>	Yes	Yes, as determined by school	Yes	Yes, as determined by school
<b>Organization-wide handbook</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

SOURCE: CMO interviews and central office survey.

Although all of the CMOs profiled here rely heavily on positive reinforcement of desirable behavior and clear consequences for undesirable behavior, the goal is not merely to keep students in line. Instead, the goal is to create a school culture that is predictable and safe for all students. CMO leaders believe this secure environment will lead students to take pride in their school and to be thoughtful about their actions. Structure is meant to support academic learning goals and even creativity.

At all of these CMOs, staff reinforce expectations that students will attend college through a variety of mechanisms, including a focus on the skills and steps necessary to be successful in a college environment and exposure to the variety of institutions available for higher learning. Leaders at ICEF public schools, for example, designed the behavior system to support the CMO's instructional emphasis on Socratic methods and oral argument. This method requires that students feel safe both physically and intellectually, and the behavior program is designed to support these goals by ensuring that students know their actions have consequences, good or bad, and that respectful behavior is a precondition for good discussion and deep learning.

## Be Consistent Across Classrooms

Consistent behavioral expectations are important not only over time, but across the entire school as well. In all four CMOs, the majority of surveyed principals reported that they strongly agreed that their school enforces behavior standards consistently. CMO staff participating in our interviews noted that students should receive the same message from every adult in the building and encounter the same response to specific behaviors. The programs used by these CMOs, therefore, aim to provide unambiguous standards of behavior as well as a routinized set of consequences for violations of these standards. Doing so, they believe, helps students learn that behavioral codes are non-negotiable.

All four CMOs' behavior programs include acronyms or sayings that can be easily remembered and recited.

### Uncommon Schools: Highly Structured Behavior System to Create Possibilities for Learning and Creativity

The student behavior program at Uncommon Schools is guided by the belief that it is through “structure”—a disciplined social environment—that the space for learning as well as “creativity and joy” is produced. Leaders in this CMO are intensely focused on achieving the few key things they feel are most important for student achievement, and structure is one of them. They seek structure not for structure’s sake, but because it is seen as an intermediate goal that is as an important waypoint on the road to academic achievement.

In several New York City middle schools, two key foundations of the behavior system are: (1) a culture based on the values of “MAPP” (Mindful, Achieving, Professional, and Prepared) and “SLANT” (Sit up straight, Listen, Ask and answer questions, Nod for understanding, and Track the speaker<sup>12</sup>) and (2) a merit/demerit system that is used with high consistency, especially by new and more inexperienced teachers. An elaborated system of rules links specific behaviors with positive and negative consequences; talking out of turn garners a demerit, while helping a fellow student without being asked is rewarded with a merit point. Individual merits and demerits are tracked on a sheet of paper held by a clipboard that moves with the students as they go from class to class throughout the day. This system enables teachers to see what has transpired in earlier periods and provides a simple record of daily behavior for each student. The organization also tracks these data over time to provide a window into trends that may represent changes in students’ home situations or psychological states.

12. SLANT was popularized by KIPP founders Dave Levin and Mike Feinberg based on the methods of mentor teacher Harriet Ball and is used in many KIPP schools and other CMOs. See Jay Mathews, *Work Hard. Be Nice.: How Two Inspired Teachers Created the Most Promising Schools in America*, Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2009.





Merits accrue over time and are used primarily during ‘Merit Auctions,’ in which students bid on prizes such as fun school supplies or special teacher-provided services like a small-group field trip to a unique destination. Accrued merits may also be a condition of participating in special school activities, like making gingerbread houses and taking a class trip at the end of the year. Demerits are tallied up at the end of the day or week and result in consequences if they occur in sufficient number, but are wiped out otherwise. However, due to the organization’s focus on respect as a foundational value, any sign of disrespect—rolling one’s eyes for example—results in an immediate detention.

One Uncommon leader described how her view of the CMO’s behavior system has changed over the years. She had originally felt that good teachers know best how to manage their classrooms and should be allowed to use whatever means they thought most appropriate for doing so. But in seeing the collective result of this policy, she came to believe that the use of different regimes in different classrooms was confusing for students and ultimately undermined the schools’ goals. Thus, over the course of her tenure as a principal, she has become a strident believer in the necessity of schoolwide systems.

Uncommon Schools’ strict behavioral program is not always easy for kids, and it is not for everyone. Organizational leaders suspect a few parents withdraw their children because they don’t want to operate within the confines of the program. But by and large, the leaders feel that most parents come to accept and even appreciate the role the behavioral code plays in making the school successful. According to Uncommon officials, students, too, seem to accept if not enjoy the system, competing with one another for the highest number of merits and sanctioning each other for behavior that is off-program. Still, like other CMOs, Uncommon Schools continues to work on how to get students to internalize desired behaviors so that highly structured rewards and consequences are less necessary, especially by the time students reach high school.

The construction and maintenance of this sort of behavioral program requires a significant amount of training for all members of the school community. Teachers receive training during a three week summer session that involves role-playing and opportunities to practice classroom management skills, as well as ongoing support from instructional leaders throughout the year. Parents learn about the system during school orientations, which principals use to link the environment of the classroom with the behavioral code; this encourages parents to be receptive if the school needs to call them about their child’s behavior. Students learn how to respond to the situations they’ll inevitably encounter—being bumped in the hallway, for instance—through teacher role-plays at the beginning of the year.

Leaders at Uncommon are clear about why they value their student behavior program. They believe that the system “depersonalizes” consequences and contributes to an environment in which teachers can teach and students can learn.

To ensure both clarity and consistency of expectations, all four CMOs include in their behavior programs acronyms or sayings that can be easily remembered and recited. The CMOs also produce handbooks that can be used by both students and teachers as references. Student behavior expectations and consequences are often posted in classrooms, are reinforced during school meetings, and are the subject of many staff meetings; in the three CMOs in which data are available, teachers reported meeting with other teachers an average of one to three times per month to discuss responses to student behavior challenges.<sup>13</sup>

Consistency and clarity of expectations are seen as key to effective management of student behavior because they provide guidance to students about how to behave in every situation and to teachers about how to react. At YES Prep, for example, misbehavior is not tolerated because it is detrimental to the entire school culture, not just a student or classroom. As one principal stated:

*If a student goes into X classroom, they're gonna get the same consequence as if they walk into Classroom Y. That consistency is really important. It just takes one student's head to be on a desk and not be addressed for that [to] poison the whole classroom. And it just takes one classroom to not be assigned by consequences to poison the culture of the whole grade level. One grade level can poison the culture of a school. And so it starts as really small granular things in consistency, and we really try and be that cultural model.*

Despite the importance ICEF staff place on having consistent processes in place, several people also noted the importance of recognizing individual students' circumstances when consequences are determined. For example, although ICEF has a policy of conducting expulsion hearings for severe offenses, the system is meant to allow consideration of extenuating or personal circumstances. Even when staff have no intention of actually expelling the student, they believe the process of sitting down with a school official and a parent will help curb undesirable behavior.

Staff from all four CMOs also mentioned that they hope that, as students mature and experience a behavioral system over time, they will begin to internalize the organizational expectations and start thinking more critically about why their behavior is right or wrong rather than just reacting to consequences. However, while they know that accomplishing this goal will be critical to their students' success in college and the labor market, most of the profiled CMOs seem to be still working through the challenge of figuring out how to do it. As one KIPP DC staff member explained:

Student behavior expectations and consequences are often posted in classrooms, are reinforced during school meetings, and are the subject of many staff meetings.

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13. The mean response for the profiled CMOs with teacher survey respondents (KIPP DC, ICEF, and Uncommon) was 4.89 vs. 4.22 for all CMOs, a significant difference at the 1 percent level. Teachers were asked how frequently they met with other teachers to discuss responses to behavior challenges on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being never, 4 being 2-8 times/year, and 7 being more than once a week.





*It's not so much that the sixth-grade systems need to look exactly like the fifth-grade systems, it's that the vertical alignment needs to make sense so that we're honoring [students'] maturity and everything is age-appropriate. We're also thinking with the end in mind and really thinking about 'is there some form of gradual release that's evident in what we're doing so that by the time they get to eighth grade and then again by the time they get to twelfth grade they really are these independent thinkers, these critical thinkers.'*

ICEF also struggles with this question, according to one principal:

*At the end of the day, how do we get students to behave because it's the right thing to do, not just because they're seeking praise? We're going to do [a system of rewards/sanctions] because we realize that we're human and we crave those things, but how do we move beyond that?*

One strategy in place at ICEF is to use different approaches to behavioral interventions based on student's age and maturity level. In addition to a sanction for misbehavior, elementary students may be asked to have a conversation or do a reflective writing piece. Yet by the high school level, students may be asked to write a "critical response" if they feel a rule or consequence was unfair, or to examine the conflict via Socratic dialogue. Ultimately, the goal is to move students from behavior driven by the possibility of reward or consequence to behavior driven by internalized values and norms.

## **Model and Enforce Norms for Student Behavior**

The four CMOs have a common approach to creating an orderly school culture: model the behavior, reinforce actions consistently, and achieve "buy-in" from all members of the community. They all use "paycheck" or merit/demerit systems to support their culture-building efforts (see the box about KIPP DC). In addition, all of these CMOs emphasize the importance of student, teacher, and parent norms to solidify schoolwide culture.

Modeling desired behavior by all staff as well as by peers, CMO leaders say, is an important way of inducing students to comply voluntarily with rules. School staff generally receive extensive training on modeling and reinforcing behavior effectively. Nearly all surveyed teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they received sufficient support to implement strategies for managing student behavior in their first year teaching at the CMO school.

One YES Prep principal explained that he trains his staff to have respectful conversations with students that model the way in which students should speak to staff. "And so we're modeling for students how they want to be treated, and then how we want to be treated as well." Once the students begin to learn the norms, modeling occurs in peer-to-peer interactions as well. A respondent from YES Prep felt that "you really start to see the change in students when they start to see their peers holding them accountable." KIPP DC has found that focusing on relationship-building and respect between teachers and students has enabled staff to de-emphasize their paycheck system, believing that solid relationships are the more important driver of student behavior. As one central office staff member noted:

*We know that at the end of the day the paycheck is nothing more than a progress report for the parent. Again, it's always about the teaching and do we have teachers in front of our kids who are strong relationship-builders and classroom managers. Kids are going to do what you want them to do and behave appropriately because they like and respect you and they respect your work.*

### **KIPP DC: A Behavior System Coupled with Respectful, Consistent Relationships**

KIPP DC's well-known behavior system and focus on strong school culture were developed by KIPP founders Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin and used in their original KIPP fifth-grade classroom in Houston in 1994. They adopted procedures, such as SLANT and the paycheck system, from mentor teachers Harriett Ball and Rafe Esquith, and prioritized relationships with families through home visits starting with their initial recruitment of students.<sup>14</sup> As the KIPP network of schools expanded, these policies were adapted and refined in other KIPP schools.

KIPP schools are encouraged to develop cultures in which students will feel happy and welcome and will grow into active, thoughtful, and conscientious people. But the school leaders are freed to implement behavior systems and policies as they see fit. Each school is encouraged to develop its own school values and to orient culture-building activities, such as assemblies, around those values.

Despite having freedom to develop their own systems, all of the KIPP DC schools use behavioral tracking systems to encourage desirable behaviors and discourage undesirable ones. In middle schools, the behavior system takes the form of “paychecks”—currency that students gain and lose based on their behaviors. For example, students may be rewarded for engaging in pro-social behavior such as returning a lost item, sticking up for another student being picked on, or going out of their way to make someone feel good. These behaviors result in “deposits” that can be cashed in for snacks, trinkets, and even trips. Students may also be rewarded for academic success, such as with a pizza party for all students achieving a particular GPA.

Students may receive deductions for such behaviors as talking back, using profanity, or violating the uniform policy, forfeiting pre-specified amounts of their paycheck currency. More severe infractions bring more severe consequences; for example,

Modeling desired behavior is an important way of inducing students to comply voluntarily with rules. School staff generally receive extensive training on modeling and reinforcing behavior effectively.

14. Mathews, *Work Hard. Be Nice.*

lying might mean being “benched,” an in-school suspension that also results in a parent meeting. Violations such as harassment or severe teasing may result in suspension, and the schools also have offenses, such as weapons violations, that result in expulsion hearings, in accordance with federal guidelines. Parents are involved in the system and receive weekly reports on their children’s behaviors.

Despite their emphasis on rewarding and sanctioning behavior, KIPP DC officials were quick to point out that maintaining student behavior is mostly about developing strong relationships between teachers and students: that respect and consistency from teachers are more important drivers of student behavior than external rewards, especially as children age and mature. As one KIPP DC central office administrator noted:

*To be honest, over the years, in middle schools especially, the paychecks have just become of decreasing importance...sometimes people hear about KIPP and they hear about all these cute systems, and they’re really, really misguided. We try to be really clear with teachers that this is really so we can have accurate records about what goes on with kids. It’s a little bit of an incentive, but you know, that dries up really quickly when (the students are) ten.*

## **Engage Parents to Reinforce and Support School Expectations**

CMOs recognize that parental buy-in is important as well. One common means of achieving this is through the use of contracts, or “commitments to excellence” as they are called at KIPP DC, which detail the responsibilities of parents and students in supporting students’ educational achievement. Three of the four CMOs require their schools to use parent or student contracts, and some regions in the fourth CMO (Uncommon Schools) elect to use them as well.<sup>15</sup> CMO staff discuss the reasons for the contract and its content with parents at an orientation session or parent meetings, and parents are asked to sign contracts to clarify their role and demonstrate their commitment to the schooling process.

Although the contracts are not binding in any way, they help build trust, which is at the heart of several of these CMOs’ efforts. At ICEF, parents commit to attending 80 percent of Parent Information Network (PIN) meetings and giving 40 hours per year of volunteer time. PIN meetings focus on conveying school-related information

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15. The Uncommon Schools network comprises four “regions,” each of which exerts some degree of operational authority over its schools.

to parents and also provide time for parent-led discussions of concerns or issues. And while parents cannot be held accountable for meeting their commitments, ICEF's home office includes parental involvement as a component of principal evaluation. ICEF views parent involvement as "absolutely key" to its success.

At ICEF, KIPP DC, and Uncommon Schools, staff feel that forming relationships with parents is critical to secure their agreement during times when they must have "tough conversations" about a child's behavior. Said one KIPP DC former principal, now a home office administrator: "I think too often...principals, and other people in leadership positions, forget the value of (establishing relationships with parents)...I feel like parents never really doubted the place from which I was coming when I had to have tough conversations with them because I made enough deposits in the beginning." To form strong relationships from the beginning, YES Prep school staff (occasionally with current students or alumni) conduct home visits with newly enrolled students during which the staff, students, and parents detail their respective commitments to the child's education.

It is worth noting that, despite the premium these CMO leaders place on forming relationships with families, they are aware that they cannot reasonably expect to obtain the cooperation of all parents in supporting or implementing the school's policies at home. For example, one principal at ICEF explained that part of the reason it is so imperative that school staff be completely consistent with students is that they may not get that consistency at home. At home, she explains, kids often ask once and then twice and parents give in. "Here it's 'I don't care how many times you ask, it's still going to be no.'" Indeed, she reports spending about 40 percent of instructional time re-establishing norms and routines in the weeks following holiday break because most of the consistency was lost during the time at home. Staff at Uncommon Schools report seeing the same pattern after summer vacation. These experiences have reinforced leaders' beliefs that behavioral modeling must be an ongoing activity throughout the school year and students' careers.

Schools must own their policies and create their own cultures. In all the profiled CMOs, principals are ultimately accountable for effective implementation of behavioral expectations.

## **Prescribe Some Student Behavior Policies Centrally, but Give Schools Flexibility in Implementation**

The four CMOs profiled here vary in the degree to which the home office specifies the student behavior programs to be used in schools. All consider clear standards for behavior to be paramount, believe in high expectations for students, and have specific ideas about essential features of school culture. Yet all also recognize that schools must own their policies and create their own cultures. Some of the profiled CMOs have central staff who oversee student behavior policies, generally chief academic officers (CAOs) or deans of students, and most use a common handbook across schools. However, in all the profiled CMOs, principals are ultimately accountable for effective implementation of behavioral expectations.





CMO leaders believe that common approaches among schools promote collaboration and will result in the sharing and refining of best practices.

Even though YES Prep allows schools to customize policies, it takes a fairly centralized approach. The central office provides a handbook that guides overall policies and provides core expectations, allowing for nuance in implementation at the school level. CMO leaders believe that common approaches among schools promote collaboration between buildings and will result in the sharing (and refining) of best practices over time. As one building director explained:

*There are definitely core elements of the program that exist from campus to campus... all the schools have clipboards. They use demerit cards. We agreed on some universal sorts of things so that we could compare data and sort of see, 'Okay...which campuses are seeing the least amount of detentions over a certain period of time?' so that sort of data...Now is that negotiable? I think so. I think if a campus said, 'Hey, I wanna get rid of this, and this is why,' and they were able to get results, great.*

Similarly, the schools in the Uncommon Schools network all use a student behavior plan based on the awarding of merits and demerits. Yet schools differ in marginal ways, such as in the number of demerits that trigger a detention and whether a student's record is wiped clean at the end of the day or accumulates over the course of a week. Schools also develop the unique character of their behavior programs through special school-level initiatives and the design of reward ceremonies and activities.

At ICEF Public Schools, the central office sets general behavioral expectations and expects all principals to create a building culture that is oriented around ICEF's mission to prepare all children to "attend and compete in the top 100 colleges and universities in the nation." However, principals set behavioral policies, decide how to communicate expectations, and are responsible for ensuring that teachers are implementing building policies in their classrooms.

KIPP DC's central office takes a relatively hands-off approach to its schools' student behavior policies, giving principals most of the authority and accountability. There are no central staff dedicated to monitoring implementation in schools and, as a staff member explained, the home office is unlikely to get involved unless "it's really, really not working and the principal doesn't know how to fix it."

### ICEF Public Schools: A Behavior Plan to Complement Socratic Teaching

ICEF Public Schools sets systemwide expectations for schools and asks schools to implement particular behavioral approaches it believes will help promote the “college-going culture” that is central to the ICEF missions also seeks to align its behavior strategies with its curriculum.

ICEF believes that Socratic teaching requires a particular emphasis on creating a learning environment in which students can take intellectual risks. The organization asks its schools to implement behavior plans based on rewarding positive behaviors and discouraging unwanted ones, and to communicate clear expectations for comportment. At the same time, ICEF schools also emphasize individualized attention and support for ICEF students and their families.

ICEF uses the acronym REAL SHARP<sup>16</sup> for expectations of elementary students (Responsible, Empathetic, Astute, Logical, Safe, Honest, Articulate, Respectful, and Positive). All ICEF elementary schools use a behavioral system based on rewards and consequences. Though elementary classrooms have some leeway in the system they use, a central office official said that, to her knowledge, all elementary classrooms are using a color system, in which students start at “green” and move to “yellow,” “orange,” and “red” rankings if negative behavior begins and continues. If students move to “red,” the student may either have to discuss the problem with the principal or the teacher may contact the student’s parents. Students may also face in-school suspension, lunch detention, or out-of-school suspension. The system also provides an opportunity for students to move above green; they can earn points or marbles that can be cashed in for rewards.

Middle and high schools also use a system of rewards and consequences, which they call a “Step” program. Students move up steps as unwanted behavior escalates, with increasing consequences for each step. They also have the opportunity to move down steps as time passes without infractions. At the fourth step, students face an automatic expulsion hearing with the home office, parents, and principal present. Even though there may be no intention of expelling the student, the home office feels that experiencing the hearing is extremely effective in curbing behavior. Though expulsion is rare, organization-wide they do expel at a higher rate than the average public school in the Los Angeles Unified School District\*, primarily because, according to one interviewee, “we actually follow our discipline program.”

*\*All ICEF schools are located in Los Angeles.*

16. REAL SHARP was developed by Christie Norvell of Norvell, Perle, and Associates in consultation with ICEF Public Schools.



Staff at ICEF believe it is crucial that students behave respectfully, not just because teachers need to maintain order, but because good behavior is morally correct.

At the elementary level, students may be asked to engage in conversations about their behavior; as they get older, they may do a reflective writing assignment about it. High school students may be asked to write a critical response about why a punishment was unfair or engage in a Socratic dialogue about a conflict.

ICEF deeply values and promotes parental involvement, believing that high expectations for student behavior could not be implemented if they could not count on parents backing them up. Parents receive and sign a copy of the handbook. They are required to attend 80 percent of Parent Information Network meetings and do 40 hours of volunteer work per year.

A solid approach to student behavior forms the backbone of ICEF's model of instruction. As one official explained, were their approach focused only on "blind delivery of content knowledge," they could be successful with a much less intensive approach. However, a system that expects all students to engage in high-level dialogue and to be prepared for college must explore the reasoning behind expectations for comportment.

## **Provide Teacher Training to Support High Standards for Classroom Behavior**

Leaders at the four CMOs see getting the right teachers on board and training them appropriately as crucial for successful implementation of a behavior program. To provide guidance in how teachers should manage behavior, all the profiled CMOs offer professional development and coaching to teachers as well as handbooks and other tools. ICEF, for example, conducts a week of training for new teachers on classroom and behavior management, and provides a behavior management handbook to teachers. While the handbook provides detail, it is not so detailed that teachers have to "flip to page 300" to resolve a specific situation. Rather, the training and handbook provide guidelines that help teachers determine how to respond to common problems.

Teacher professional development sessions at Uncommon Schools emphasize training in the behavioral program, including role-playing exercises and discussions of the types of situations teachers should expect to encounter and tips for dealing with them. Staff we spoke with stressed the hard work that goes into helping teachers learn how to deploy the system effectively and efficiently. Similarly, KIPP DC spends much of its summer

professional development time on classroom management and behavior. Principals look for adherence to school rules on walk-throughs and classroom management plays a large part in teacher evaluations.

For all four CMOs, the purpose of providing training and written guidelines is to ensure that teachers know how to respond to student behavior in consistent ways. As one official from YES explained, “I think a lot of CMOs get really caught up in signage and what’s on the walls, but ultimately, it’s how teachers are trained to own it that’s most important. What time are you spending before the school year starts on the nitty gritty, the small things that you want to ensure you’re seeing in your students?”

In sum, staff in these CMOs report that clear positive and negative consequences for behaviors, posted expectations, and parental contracts are important ingredients of the school culture, but it is the daily hard work of teachers, coaches, and principals to consistently model and enforce schoolwide behavior standards that they view as most important.

Training and written guidelines are meant to ensure that teachers know how to respond to student behavior in consistent ways. As one official explained: “I think a lot of CMOs get really caught up in signage and what’s on the walls, but ultimately, it’s how teachers are trained to own it that’s most important.”





## SECTION **3**

# Teacher Coaching

### Key Findings

- The “coaching-intensive” CMOs strategically target teacher needs
- Coaching is tightly aligned with school and central office goals
- Teachers are observed frequently and receive quick feedback
- Coaches need specialized skills and solid relationships with teachers
- Effective coaching relies on other personnel practices and school culture

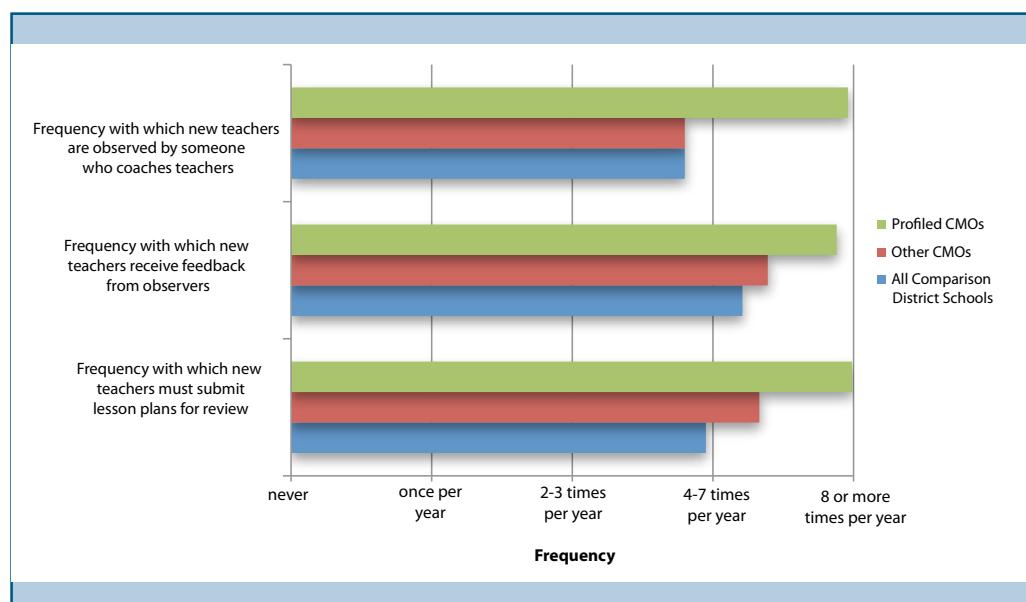
Across the country, schools often fail to help teachers overcome common challenges, whether related to managing a classroom, engaging students, or explaining complicated concepts. New teachers are especially likely to experience difficulty, and they are even less likely to receive direct support if they work in schools with low-income populations.<sup>17</sup> Some studies indicate that providing coaches (staff whose job it is to help teachers improve in classrooms) to new teachers can enhance their effectiveness, particularly if that support is provided over at least two years.<sup>18</sup>

This section focuses on how four high-impact CMOs—**Aspire, KIPP DC, Uncommon Schools, and YES Prep**—provide individualized support and development for their teachers. These four “coaching-intensive” CMOs include three of the CMOs profiled in the previous section on behavior policies (KIPP DC, Uncommon, and Yes Prep) as well as one other CMO (Aspire). The intensity of coaching in these four CMOs is reflected in the high frequency with which teachers are observed by coaches, receive feedback on their performance, and submit lesson plans for review. The principal surveys indicate that these three dimensions of coaching are more intensive in these CMOs relative to both other CMOs and regular district schools (see Figure III.1).

17. Johnson et al., “The Support Gap: New Teachers’ Early Experiences in High-Income and Low-Income Schools,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(61), October 29, 2004.

18. Glazerman et al., “Impacts of Comprehensive Teacher Induction: Final Results from a Randomized Controlled Study,” Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2010.

**Figure 2.** Profiled CMOs differ significantly from other CMOs and from comparison district schools in frequency of observation, feedback, and review of lesson plans for new teachers



SOURCE: Principal survey.

NOTE: Differences between profiled CMOs (Aspire, KIPP DC, Uncommon, and YES Prep) and other CMOs and between profiled CMOs and comparison district schools are all statistically significant at the 5 percent level. The other measure included in our overall composite of teacher coaching and monitoring is the frequency with which new teachers are observed by principals or administrators; there were no statistically significant differences between the four CMOs and other CMOs on this measure.

While these four CMOs all demonstrated above-average emphasis on coaching and exhibited some common priorities, they differed in their specific approaches to coaching. The definition of instructional support and the priority placed on coaching does not vary substantially across CMOs, but who does what and how roles are divided does differ. As a result, support structures share some common elements but are executed by different people and with different allocations of time/resources. Aspire has a straightforward model, with an instructional coach assigned to three to four schools.

YES Prep has specialized coaching staff for new teachers, whereas KIPP DC employs some full-time coaches, but considers principals to be the primary coaches. At Uncommon Schools, select teachers devote part of their time to coaching. Table III.1 summarizes the models, which are described in more detail below.



**Table III.1.** Coaching models at the four coaching-intensive CMOs

	Aspire	YES Prep	KIPP DC	Uncommon
<b>Staffing model for coaching</b>	1 coach per 4 schools	1 coach per 2-3 schools for new teachers 2-3 instructional deans at every school to support all teachers	1 coach shared across 5 elementary and early childhood schools 2 literacy coaches and 1 math coach shared across 4 secondary schools Principals are considered the primary coaches	Middle schools have 3-4 teachers released from 25% of teaching responsibilities to serve as coaches for each school Elementary schools use a co-teaching model instead of instructional coaches
<b>Frequency with which each teacher is expected to be observed by principal</b>	Multiple times per week	Monthly	Weekly	Multiple times per week
<b>Frequency with which each teacher is expected to be observed by coach, specialist, or master teacher</b>	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly	Multiple times per week
<b>Frequency with which each teacher is expected to be observed by a peer</b>	Weekly	Quarterly	Weekly	Weekly

**SOURCES:** Interviews of central office staff and principals (for information on staffing model); surveys of CMO central office staff (for information on frequency of observations).

## Target New and Experienced Teachers' Weak Points

The four coaching-intensive CMOs attempt to provide highly individualized support designed to address the unique needs of each teacher, whether new or experienced, struggling or thriving. Coaching supports for instruction or classroom management can include more frequent observations, highly structured feedback, or review of lesson plans.

**Novice teachers receive intensive coaching on classroom management.** For all four CMOs, intensive support for new teachers is a high priority of the coaching efforts. Like most CMOs across the country, these organizations rely heavily on a young, relatively inexperienced teaching force and draw heavily from Teach For America and other alternative training programs. According to the CMO leaders, this is largely intentional. The CMO leaders feel that new teachers (1) are more open to learning the CMO's

approach to teaching and have fewer preconceptions about their roles, and (2) are often passionate about the CMO's mission and willing to work extremely hard to achieve it. However, the CMO leaders we spoke with also say that the nature of the intensive work of serving an urban, low-income student population means they experience high levels of teacher turnover. Therefore, they must help new teachers quickly learn how to teach effectively and in a way that is consistent with the CMO's approach to teaching and learning.

As described in Section II, some of these CMOs maintain that teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn in a disorderly environment. For that reason, the type of support high-performing CMOs provide to new teachers focuses at least as much on classroom management and planning as on effective instructional techniques and teaching content.

In order to ensure that new teachers are effective with a very challenging student population, leaders in the four CMOs provide these teachers with specialized, extra support. CMO leaders believe this intensive support overcomes the significant ramp-up time that research has shown is typical for new teachers, reducing the time needed to learn the CMO's approach and become effective.

According to our interviews, approximately one-third of all teachers at YES Prep are first-year teachers. Despite the inexperience of its overall teaching force, YES Prep's students outperform their district peers. As one YES Prep home office staff member explained, coaching plays an important role in that success:

*You know, people say, 'You need experienced teachers working with children in poverty or children that are behind,' and I highly disagree with that. I don't think you need experienced teachers. I think you need teachers that are well trained, willing to adjust, and getting good coaching. Those are the things that are most important.*

A first-year teacher at YES Prep is observed by an instructional coach approximately once every 1.5 weeks. A typical teacher can have someone informally observing as often as every week (beyond the minimum package of observations per year, which includes two full formal observations with conferences, four evaluative walkthroughs with conferences if requested by the teacher, and five non-evaluative qualitative walk-throughs). YES Prep also runs a 16-day summer induction program for novice teachers, which focuses on effective lesson planning, classroom management, and adjusting to the CMO culture and expectations. Many new teachers at KIPP DC have a principal, coach, or mentor teacher in their classroom every day or every other day, to work on classroom management and planning.

Similarly, Uncommon Schools recognizes that new teachers often require more intensive and frequent coaching support than experienced teachers. Even so, leaders are intent on ensuring that experienced teachers receive growth opportunities, and they credit their ability to retain ambitious teachers to the "investments" they make in helping every teacher "get

Intensive support for new teachers is a high priority of the coaching efforts.





better, faster, every day.” Figuring out how to customize training for experienced teachers has been a challenge, however, and is an ongoing project.

**Coaching emphasizes continuous improvement for experienced teachers.** All of the coaching-intensive CMOs provide at least some coaching for experienced teachers. Such coaching tends to focus more on fine-tuning of instructional practices so that all teachers will continue to improve throughout their careers, but even very experienced teachers who are new to the CMO must be trained in the CMO “way.” Coaching is also an important element of the career ladder for more experienced CMO teachers and an avenue for professional growth.

At Uncommon Schools, each teacher’s strengths and weaknesses are assessed and each teacher is paired with a coach who has the skills to help that teacher improve in his or her key target areas.

At Uncommon Schools, teacher coaching efforts are highly personalized. At the beginning of the year, each teacher’s strengths and weaknesses are assessed (even experienced teachers) and each teacher is paired with a coach (the principal, the dean of curriculum, or another staff member) who has the skills to help that teacher improve in his or her few key target areas. Weekly observations by coaches are designed to ensure that teachers are making progress on their personal goals. Beyond this, an intensive, multiweek summer session, which brings all teachers together for training on both classroom management and instructional techniques, is seen as critical for success. Classroom management is taught through role-playing and situational enactments, while instructional training is grounded in Uncommon’s “taxonomy of instructional effectiveness.” The taxonomy is a 357-page document (recently published as a book by Doug Lemov, a Managing Director of Uncommon Schools) that describes and classifies specific instructional techniques employed by highly effective teachers.<sup>19</sup>

At KIPP DC, principals report that even experienced teachers typically have the principal in the classroom for a short observation (10-20 minutes) every week, and this visit is always followed by some kind of feedback (such as, “Loved the ‘do now’” or “What’s going on with this kid?”). Coaching for experienced teachers tends to focus on independent goal-setting, while new or struggling teachers receive more formal feedback.

**Quick intervention is provided for struggling teachers.** Struggling teachers at KIPP DC are identified using observations, assessment data, and student/parent feedback. They are immediately put on an improvement plan. They are formally observed at a minimum every two to three weeks and rated on a rubric. The KIPP DC leaders interviewed say that struggling teachers usually improve with intensive coaching. Across all nine schools in the CMO, only one or two teachers per year end up losing their jobs because they fail to improve.

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19. Doug Lemov, *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*, Jossey-Bass, April 2010.

## Aspire: Strategic Coaching in Five Acts

In Aspire's early years, coaches focused on training teachers in both the theory and practice of a variety of pedagogical practices. However, at a meeting in January 2005, several coaches were concerned with the pattern of disruptions in the classroom that continued to interfere with focused instruction. One interviewee told us, "As a group we agreed it was insane that, this far into the school year, teachers were still struggling with this, and that we should do something so we were not sitting around that table the following January with the same problem." To address the problem, Aspire did two things. First, they broke the coaches' year into five "acts":

*Act 1: June–November 1.* Coaches focus on new teachers and work on classroom management and relationship building.

*Act 2: October 15.* Coaches use fall interim assessment data to identify teachers to prioritize, focusing on those who seem to be having the most difficulty raising student achievement.

*Act 3: December–January.* When winter interim assessments come in, coaches re-prioritize.

*Act 4: March–April.* In spring, when state exam pretest results come in, coaches use "any means possible" to get students on track—even doing some teaching themselves if needed so students learn the concepts before the year-end exam.

*Act 5: May.* Coaches may plan for next year or continue to work with teachers.

Second, Aspire began to work with a national consultant, Lee Canter, to provide a simple three-step program that all teachers, regardless of teaching style, could follow. The Canter system guides teachers to (1) give clear direction about what the class is expected to do (such as, "Open your books to page 22 without talking"); (2) narrate ("I see that Johnny is opening his book to page 22 without talking"); and (3) follow up with consequences for students who do not follow the direction. According to Aspire staff, the Canter method must be tied to a schoolwide commitment and plan. They believe the shared commitment and plan allow for students to understand that there is a common set of expectations across the school for behavior and that there is a common and fair set of consequences in place to create a great learning environment. Aspire allows each school to develop its own behavior policies but requires each one to have a policy, and it must be connected to the Canter method or another program to which everyone agrees. Aspire also leaves room and expectation for positive culture-building tools as well. (For example, many Aspire schools utilize the Responsive Classroom approach.)





To support teachers in implementing this plan, Aspire staff first put together a training program for all new teachers and principals. Next, in collaboration with Canter, they established a system for giving teachers immediate feedback on classroom management. To foster appropriate teacher response to classroom behavior, Aspire employs real-time coaching, in which coaches observe from the back of the classroom and coach teachers on appropriate responses to behavior via an earpiece. Aspire staff believe that real-time feedback allows for two things that after-the-fact coaching does not. First, it ensures that the teacher develops a sense of the pacing and timing that are required in responding to behavior (both positive and negative). Additionally, it provides the teacher with the precise words to use in the given situation, believing that effective teachers know what to say, and when and how to say it appropriately.

While one interviewee felt that real-time coaching has worked very well for many teachers (with some teachers describing it as “revolutionary”), she has also found that it does not work for all teachers. However, because it has been effective for many, Aspire is experimenting with rolling out real-time feedback to coaching on instructional strategies, not just behavior.

According to Aspire staff, the core elements of the coaching strategy are more important than particular instructional methods. These core elements include (1) a whole school effort, in which all teachers agree to the same approach and the principal and other school leaders commit to support and enforce teachers’ decisions, and (2) a concerted effort to cultivate a productive relationship between the coaches and teachers. One central office leader argued that a coach cannot be successful if the teachers do not respect and want to listen to the coach. This is not a matter of being “liked” but rather having a strong, trusting relationship based on mutual respect.

As Aspire has grown from 3 to 34 schools and from 1 to almost 20 coaches, the central office staff has increasingly focused on leadership training for its principals, lead teachers, and coaches. The training offered to date is designed, in part, to help teachers, principals, and coaches work together as teams within their schools and across the organization. As part of the training, leaders read management and team-building literature.

*We've found that the teams change so quickly that leaders need help figuring out how to constantly rebuild their team cultures...You can't do great work without a team that is committed to looking at data together, holding people accountable, and providing constant feedback on what works and what doesn't.*

## Align Coaching with School and Central Office Goals

Staff interviewed in the four CMOs agreed that, whatever the coaching structure, coaches cannot operate in isolation. For example, feedback to teachers should not be based on the coach's personal preferences and experiences. Everything coaches do must be tightly aligned with school- and organization-wide instructional goals and normed with the coaching provided by the principals and other coaches, so that teachers receive consistent feedback and expectations. In all four CMOs, coaches meet regularly to talk about specific teaching problems and share potential solutions.

At Aspire, one central office leader says, "We care a lot that (coaches) carry the same messages." Monthly all-coach meetings are used to reinforce the messages, and principals and teachers have multiple opportunities to let the supervisors of the coaches know if the coaching is not effective or consistent. Ultimately, however, the quality assurance at Aspire is fairly informal. One interviewee told us, "It's an intimate group and people just hear if someone is off message." Central office leaders believe that about 75 percent of coaches at any given time are on the same page, but some of those interviewed worry about how Aspire will maintain informal norms as it grows.

In the first few years of Aspire's operation, the coaching program was informal and unstructured. Coaches "dropped by" classrooms, and set their own priorities each week. After a while, however, it became clear that nobody, including principals, knew whether or how coaches were adding value. Don Shalvey, Aspire's founding CEO, finally "read coaches the riot act" and said, "We're paying a lot of money for you and it's not clear what the return on investment is."

This prompted the Aspire coaching team to define "touch-points": the most critical uses of their time. Coaches now set aside one day per week for planning with other coaches. They spend the remaining days at their four assigned schools. At each school, a coach works with five teachers for one-to-two hours per week (the specific teachers differ each week). The coach meets with the principal once a week to coordinate and strategize. Aspire's touch-points have been refined based on constant feedback about what is working from teachers, coaches, and principals, but the CMO has held to the basic structure.

At Uncommon Schools, the CMO's instructional taxonomy classifies and codifies effective instruction in a common framework with a consistent vocabulary. Leaders believe that in creating this "common language" they help ensure that everyone in the organization is on the same page with regard to the goals and desired practices. Finally, they also believe that the taxonomy and the commitment to embedding it throughout the organization communicate the seriousness with which the organization approaches instructional improvement, and helps ensure that all teachers continue to improve their skills.

In all four CMOs, coaches meet regularly to talk about specific teaching problems and share potential solutions.



### KIPP DC: Principals Are the Primary Coaches

KIPP DC has instructional coaches who work from the central office, but school principals are considered the primary instructional leaders and each principal chooses how the coach is used at his or her campus. For that reason, roles of coaches often differ among the KIPP DC schools. At one school, a coach might simply hold workshops for all teachers; at another, the coach might observe and review lesson plans.

Meanwhile, the primary responsibility for coaching teachers is borne by the principal. The principal is the one who is in the classroom constantly and has a pulse on the building. As one central office leader explained: “There is no handbook for coaching at KIPP....What is important is the instructional leadership of the principals and vice principals.”

KIPP DC instructional coaches have not changed the roles and responsibilities of the principal as instructional leader for the school. KIPP DC principals provide 85 to 90 percent of instructional support for teachers and are in charge of the entire development plan for teachers (goal-setting, observations, debriefs, middle and end-of-year evaluations). The principals are also ultimately responsible for addressing any instructional issues at their schools. Principals are in classrooms every day conducting short visits and short follow-ups as much as possible; these informal conversations constitute KIPP DC’s coaching model.

To ensure that teachers internalize professional development goals and lessons, principals take “learning walks” consisting of a series of short observations on specific issues their schools are working on. For example, if a principal notices that lesson objectives are not related to assessment results, the principal would give a professional development session on it, model it, then make it a focus of learning walks for the next three weeks.

Because principals are an integral piece of KIPP DC’s approach to coaching teachers, the CMO focuses on developing school leaders from within the organization. Central office staff reported that KIPP DC principals are nearly always homegrown, explaining that “we know that the best person to open our next early childhood school is teaching early childhood for us right now—even if we don’t know who it is. The likelihood that somebody else can come in and do the job better than that person is slim to none.” Indeed, this “intense” focus on strong leadership is considered by central office leaders to be a primary reason for KIPP DC’s “not just success but sustained success.”

At KIPP DC, coaching is a way to help teachers apply professional development goals and lessons in their daily classroom instruction. The principal may identify an issue on which the school needs to focus (such as math concepts in the early grades) and try to address the issue by leading a professional development session on the topic for all teachers, modeling the type of teaching that the principal wants to see, observing in classrooms to see that teachers are doing it, and providing direct feedback on implementation.

YES Prep also stresses the importance of integrating coaching and professional development: “The way that your coaching and professional learning intersect is really important. What are you teaching in your [professional learning] session that is going to be carried through with the instructional coach? Is it just going to be something they go sit through and then it dies, or is it going to be something people follow up on?”

Coaching interventions are closely tied to schoolwide use of formative assessment data. Three of these CMOs conduct formative student exams quarterly; the other conducts them every six to eight weeks. The data are broken down by classrooms and discussed among coaches, teachers, and principals. In addition, all four of these CMOs also use the results of informal, day-to-day, student assessments as an opportunity for coaching. At Uncommon, for instance, coaches might talk with their charges about the success of “exit tickets” used in the classroom to assess students’ learning during the class period. Coaches may also help teachers develop strategies for re-teaching areas that students didn’t learn.

Teachers in these four CMOs are observed and provided feedback much more often than those in the rest of the CMOs in our sample.

## **Observe Teachers Frequently and Provide Quick Feedback**

Across the four CMOs, central office staff believe that effective coaching requires frequent contact between coaches and teachers. In most of the CMOs profiled here, coaches support multiple schools, typically spending one to two full days per week in each. At Uncommon, by contrast, coaches are staff members: the principal, dean of curriculum, and teachers serve as instructional leaders in addition to their other duties. These individuals are thus “built-in” to the school structure, which allows them to interact with teachers multiple times a week. This occurs through weekly review of lesson plans, grade and subject team collaboration, and a weekly meeting toward the end of the school week, which is devoted to teacher professional development and addressing schoolwide issues and concerns. The coaches also strive to observe teachers in the classroom each week. According to our survey of CMO principals, teachers in these four CMOs are observed and provided feedback much more often than those in the rest of the CMOs in our sample (see Figure III.1).





At YES Prep, first-year teachers are observed at least every two weeks. The home office expects teachers to receive feedback on their performance within 24 hours of each observation.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these observations and debriefings, teachers have substantial additional interaction with coaches, including feedback on lesson plans, phone conversations, and reaching out via YES Prep's internal communication system (instant messaging system).

Close scrutiny of lesson plans and other planning materials is also common in these CMOs. YES Prep teachers post lesson plans so any observer who goes into a classroom can see them. Lesson plans are posted in the same place in every classroom. If a lesson plan is not posted during an evaluative observation, the teacher is cited or penalized. Long-term planning and assessment are also monitored: teachers turn in a curricular plan for the year. In addition, teachers submit student binders to principals showing feedback that they provided on student work. At Uncommon, teachers are asked to submit their lesson plans each Friday for the following week.

Teachers at these CMOs know that intensive observation and regular feedback are an expected part of the job. KIPP DC leaders say they are very upfront about the frequency of observations and coaching during the hiring process, and teachers know what they are signing up for. For some applicants, this is a clear attraction: some teachers transferred to work at Uncommon after participating in training sessions conducted by Uncommon staff during professional development seminars.

Instructional coaches at these CMOs do not conduct official observations and evaluations of teachers, so their role can remain completely supportive. Explained one central office leader at Aspire:

*Coaches are not the teachers' boss. The principal is the boss and the expert on the evaluation rubric. The coach is supposed to be the expert on finding the best resources in the country and helping teachers access them in meaningful ways.*

Aspire coaches spend a lot of time putting resources on “Purple Planet” (Aspire’s internal database, which ties indicators to lesson plans and templates) and helping teachers find and use appropriate resources. They do not even have access to teacher rating systems.

## **Coaches Need to Have Specific Skills and Solid Relationships with Teachers**

Because coaching is such an integral part of these CMOs, coaches are chosen with care whether they are groomed from within or hired externally. Coaches must, of course, be

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20. The policy is that debriefings must occur within two days of observations, and written feedback must be provided in advance if the debriefing does not occur on the day of the observation.

skilled at the CMO's approach to instruction and classroom management. But many CMOs have found that what makes a great teacher is not sufficient to make a good coach.

Coaches must be able to establish strong collaborative relationships with other teachers. Their input has to be respected enough to be taken seriously and acted upon. Coaches often have to deliver hard news to teachers; doing so gracefully, without alienating them, is an art. One Aspire interviewee refers to this as the coach's "bedside manner." In addition to looking for coaches with strong instructional expertise, Aspire and YES Prep value those who can build strong relationships with people. Uncommon looks for individuals who can readily reflect upon and communicate their rationale for using particular techniques.

Coaches need to organize their time well, manage a very complex schedule, and set priorities. They also must be flexible enough to shift priorities as new test scores come in or crises arise. Finally, coaches in these CMOs must be coachable themselves, open to feedback and change.

Coaches are not exempt from training, close scrutiny, and feedback. At YES Prep, coaches meet as a team every Thursday for about four hours to discuss their focus areas (the skill or content that every coach is concentrating on) and review data together. This meeting also includes at least 45 minutes to an hour of training from the home office. Coaches are observed in their role by home office staff who oversee the coaching program and they receive feedback every two weeks; they also receive formal feedback four times per year. In addition, a professional learning specialist provides coaches with feedback on how they plan for and facilitate their professional learning sessions.

One home office leader explained why YES Prep invests so much in coaching its coaches:

*I see a lot of people making the assumption that if somebody gets to the coach status, that they're done being coached. Nothing can be farther from the truth...their growth needs to be fostered, and they need to be getting a lot of feedback because they are the change agent when it comes to our teachers.*

Staff at YES Prep believe that it's a mistake to expect coaches to be content specialists in every subject as well as experts in instructional practice and behavior management. To allow coaches to focus on pedagogy, YES Prep maintains a separate arm of the home office to support content development. Aspire seeks out generalists and expects its coaches to be able to provide support regardless of grade level or subject—a skill that, one interviewee said, is difficult for some coaches.

Coaches must be open to feedback and change:  
"...their growth needs to be fostered, and they need to be getting a lot of feedback because they are the change agent when it comes to our teachers."





### **YES Prep: Coaching as Customer Service**

At YES Prep, full-time instructional coaches are deployed from the home office to support first-year teachers via the Teaching Excellence Program. Selecting instructional coaches for new teachers is a multistep process that begins with an initial essay and includes:

- A behavioral interview, a technical interview, and an instructional leadership interview
- Role-play, observing a teacher, and then working with the teacher; the candidate receives feedback and then does another role play
- A sample lesson
- Logistical Planning Assessment (scheduling exercise designed to assess candidate's ability to manage multiple tasks and deadlines across 2-3 schools)
- A professional learning presentation and materials review

Coaches attend a summer institute conducted by YES Prep that includes training on becoming a better instructional coach (including video coaching, data coaching, mindset coaching, and so on); being “good providers of customer service because the schools really are our client;” and facilitating sessions for professional learning.

A typical day for a YES Prep instructional coach, according to a central office leader, includes the following activities:

- Complete a walkthrough (observation) for a teacher
- Prepare professional development for a campus
- Meet with the Dean of Instruction at one of the schools
- Another walkthrough
- Complete a performance “norming” meeting with an assistant principal (to discuss teacher performance against a benchmark)
- Submit professional learning documents for feedback
- Plan meeting with a teacher
- Check in with coach's supervisor
- Lead professional development for one of the schools
- Debrief with a teacher

The Dean of Instruction's job is to "provide observations, both evaluative and qualitative, to teachers and then also to work with teachers individually on specific areas of need, and provide professional development to teachers." A dean typically spends 60 to 75 percent of the day in a classroom. He or she also meets as a team with other instructional leaders at their school (including the middle and high school principals, the school director, and the director of academics) and plans and organizes weekly schoolwide professional development sessions.

## **Ensure Other Personnel Practices and School Culture Support Coaching**

Several CMO staff noted that the efficacy of coaching depends on a number of other organizational strategies. For example, KIPP DC leaders are adamant that recruiting and retaining strong school leaders is critical. An interviewee at KIPP DC told us: "As helpful as instructional coaches are, they are not the silver bullet. Ideally, your school leader should be the instructional leader of the building, and you should really be investing in that school leadership pipeline as much as possible."

Of course, teachers themselves must be coachable—responsive to suggestions rather than defensive. According to the CMO leaders, having great coaches in place does not help if teachers are not open to feedback. Hence, CMO human resource policies and procedures focus on selecting teachers at least in part for their ability to process feedback, and principals are encouraged to move them out if they fail to make efforts to improve.

CMO staff stressed the importance of ensuring that teachers, principals, coaches, and central office support staff are all on the same page about school-wide and organization-wide goals. Again, this is interrelated with hiring practices. All of the coaching-intensive CMOs explain to applicants the types of instructional strategies, culture, and philosophies they want to see in their schools, and they try to hire based on applicants' fit with that vision.

Finally, some CMO leaders say they do not think their coaches could be effective without a CMO-wide culture of high expectations and continuous improvement based on data. Without those two factors, coaches might simply be providing support for slow change or the wrong change. Said one CMO official: "It's all meaningless if it's not done in the context of schools with strong data systems and behavior management systems... It won't manifest in improvement. It won't work if people don't have time to ponder their data and their practice."

CMO human resource policies and procedures focus on selecting teachers at least in part for their ability to process feedback, and principals are encouraged to move them out if they fail to make efforts to improve.

All of the coaching-intensive CMOs explain to applicants the types of instructional strategies, culture, and philosophies they want to see in their schools, and they try to hire based on applicants' fit with that vision.



## SECTION 4

# Potential Implications

High expectations for student behavior and intensive teacher coaching should not be considered “silver bullets.”

These practices are more effective when coordinated or implemented in conjunction with other strategies.

The two promising practices described in the preceding sections—high expectations for student behavior and intensive teacher coaching—are important to consider on their own merits, but are also closely related and appear to be mutually reinforcing. Each CMO has put a great deal of thought into developing its student culture and teacher coaching practices. Teacher coaching at these CMOs is designed to support both classroom management and instruction, especially for new teachers. The CMOs use coaching as a means of supporting high expectations for student behavior and maintaining consistency across classrooms. This may be why, among the five CMOs that met criteria for inclusion in this report, three of them qualified as exemplars of both high expectations for student behavior and intensive teacher coaching.

CMO leaders also tell us that high expectations for student behavior and intensive teacher coaching should not be considered “silver bullets.” These leaders suggest that these practices are more effective when coordinated or implemented in conjunction with other strategies, such as:

- Recruitment and training of strong school leaders who can monitor and improve instruction, hold teachers accountable, and set the tone for student behavior and school culture
- Commitment to college-going expectations and academic supports for all students, regardless of background
- Development of strong data systems, time set aside for teachers to analyze and discuss data, and an expectation that teachers will regularly adjust instruction based on evidence
- Formulation of school- or system-wide instructional goals and frameworks to guide teacher, coach, and principal action
- Development of strong, trusting relationships between school staff and students
- Provision of resources (such as handbooks and online lesson plans) from the central office to inform teacher practice
- Cultivation of commitments from parents to reinforce school actions

As noted above, caution is needed in interpreting these findings. It is possible that none of these practices are the main drivers of these CMOs' substantial impacts on student achievement; instead, they may be simply correlated with other practices we have yet to identify that are responsible for these schools' high performance.

The five CMOs profiled in this report faced relatively few constraints as they developed their overall approaches and practices. They started from scratch and had the ability to selectively hire their central office and school staff. These particular CMO schools are not subject to seniority or tenure rules affecting which staff are dismissed, retained, or promoted. The staff, students, and families actively choose to be at these schools and agree to the expectations. Some of the conditions that CMO leaders feel are necessary for success in implementing effective student behavior policies and teacher coaching may not be present in district schools, in other charter schools, or even in other CMOs. For example, some districts explicitly prohibit the use of student rewards, which are important to the student behavior systems of these CMOs. It is not clear how extensively these strategies could be implemented in other environments, but it would likely take strong commitment from school and district leaders to adopt and support new approaches.

Perhaps most importantly, these organizations' leaders are committed to creating an environment where staff are pushed to continuously learn and grow in the instructional and behavior management skills that translate into student achievement. They are willing to put the conditions in place that promote these values, and they are intentional in how they align resources (such as funding of coaches) and structures (such as career ladders to grow coaches internally, or consistently enforced behavior management policies) to support these ends. One Aspire central office official expressed caution for those who want to simply copy Aspire's coaching model in a district:

*It's all meaningless if it's not done in the context of schools with strong data systems and behavior management systems. It won't manifest in improvement. Coaches must be able to improve instruction to do their jobs. It won't work if people don't have time to ponder their data and their practice.... If I had to try to do this in a district, I'd wonder 'How do I get all these people to invest in a shared outcome?'*

An official at ICEF suggested that the Los Angeles Unified School District could adopt ICEF's behavior program if the district committed to real consequences for severe infractions, noting that ICEF expels at a higher rate than the district because "we actually enforce our discipline policy." When policies are not enforced, this official believes, students learn that their actions have no real consequences, making it more challenging to control student behavior.

That said, early evidence from one experiment is encouraging: Houston's "Apollo 20" project has implemented, in nine conventional public schools, close teacher monitoring, high expectations for students, and several other features identified with "No Excuses"

It is not clear how extensively these strategies could be implemented in other environments, but it would likely take strong commitment from school and district leaders to adopt and support new approaches.



Scale can bring its own challenges for CMOs. One Aspire manager worries how the organization will maintain its coaching quality as it continues to grow.

ICEF's recent financial struggles demonstrate the need for a financial model that can sustain the cost of coaching and other intensive teacher supports without heavy reliance on philanthropy.

charter schools. The project has shown a positive impact on student achievement in the first year of implementation.<sup>21</sup>

While districts may lack the autonomy to apply some practices, independent charter schools may lack the economies of scale needed to implement effective coaching. In some CMOs, such as Aspire, coaches are stationed in the central office and serve multiple schools. Even in CMOs like KIPP DC, where the principal often serves as the primary coach, the scale of the CMO's internal labor market may facilitate good coaching: Principals are often promoted from other schools within the CMO and thereby bring experience in the CMO's overall instructional and behavior management system. On the other hand, scale can bring its own challenges for CMOs.<sup>22</sup> One Aspire manager worries how the organization will maintain its coaching quality as it continues to grow. ICEF's recent financial struggles demonstrate the need for a financial model that can sustain the cost of coaching and other intensive teacher supports without heavy reliance on philanthropy.

Some districts are already experimenting with strategies similar to the practices of high-performing CMOs, and these new initiatives could inform future policy and practice. These districts are refining their teacher evaluation, professional development, seniority rules, and collective bargaining agreements in ways that give principals and teacher coaches greater ability to intervene with struggling teachers. In a few cases, this is occurring in close collaboration with charter schools. The Hartford and New Haven public school districts, for example, are partnering with Achievement First (a local CMO) to train principals jointly. This training is designed to help principals more effectively function as instructional leaders and support the development of teachers. Some independent charter schools are refining the way they train and support their teachers in order to reduce teacher attrition. Some states, districts, and charter schools are introducing new data systems that provide teachers with useful information from student assessments that might enhance teacher coaching efforts. And some districts are implementing a portfolio approach that gives schools more flexibility in defining behavior rules and allows principals to more vigorously enforce their policies.<sup>23</sup> Experimenting with and evaluating these new strategies will be important to improve practices across charter and district public schools more broadly.

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21. Roland G. Fryer, "Creating 'No Excuses' (Traditional) Public Schools: Preliminary Evidence from an Experiment in Houston," Working Paper 17494, Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011.
22. Robin Lake, Brianna Dusseault, Melissa Bowen, Allison Demeritt, Paul Hill, "The National Study of Charter Management Organization Effectiveness: Report on Interim Findings," Center on Reinventing Public Education and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., June 2010.
23. For more information about districts implementing a portfolio management strategy, see <http://www.crpe.org/cs/crpe/view/projects/7>.

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